

# Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps

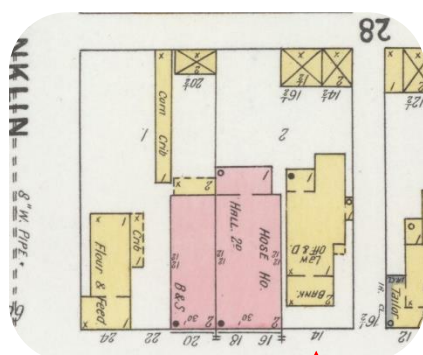
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Indiana DNR Division of Historic Preservation & Archaeology



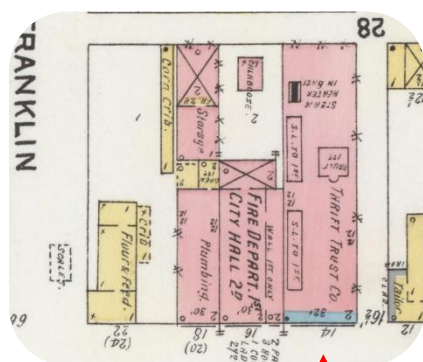
*Fire insurance maps are an excellent research tool. They are a primary source material that provides a rich historical snapshot of the commercial activity and urban and residential landscape of America's historic towns and cities. During the mid-nineteenth through mid-twentieth centuries, cities and towns were surveyed and mapped to help fire insurance companies assess fire risks and establish rates. The most prolific and well-known fire insurance company in the United States is The Sanborn Map Company of New York. Most of Indiana's cities and towns (of at least 1,000-2,000 residents) were recorded by the Sanborn Map Company between the late 1880s and mid-1950s.*

Historically, the meticulously surveyed and detailed, hand-drawn maps were developed for fire insurance purposes; however, they provide a wealth of information for modern use by architects, engineers, historic preservationists, archaeologists, historians, genealogists, city planners, property owners, and amateur history enthusiasts.

By comparing Sanborn maps published over time, readers may be able to determine when a building was constructed, demolished, altered, or added onto, as well as the evolution of development in a neighborhood or commercial downtown. Some may also point out potential environmental hazards in an area [Figures 1 & 2]. A sample of information the maps provide includes addresses, names of streets and businesses, footprints/outlines of buildings and structures, the number of stories, building construction materials, location of window and door openings, and staircase and elevator shafts.



1899



1905

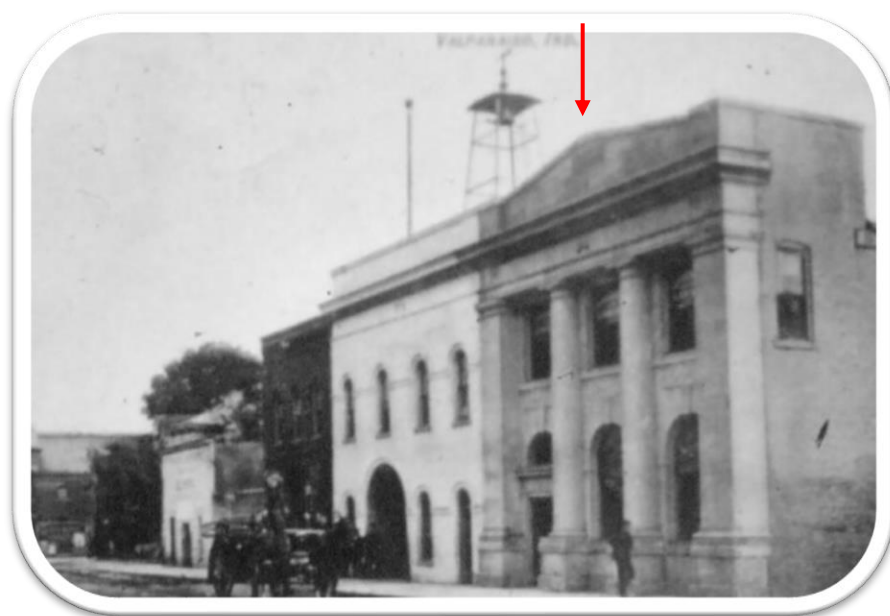
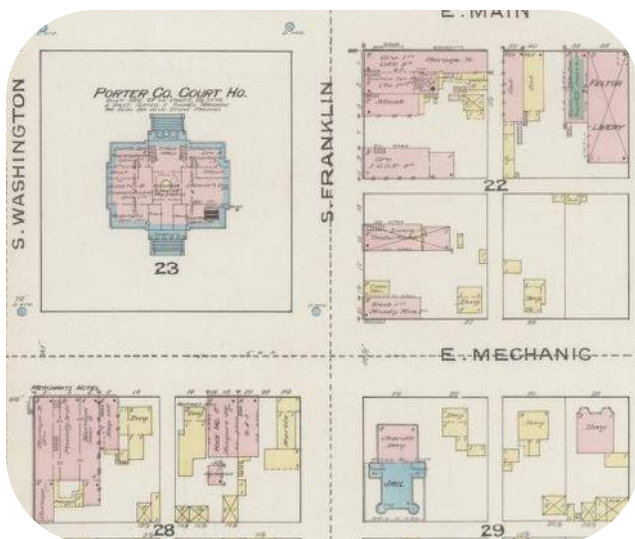
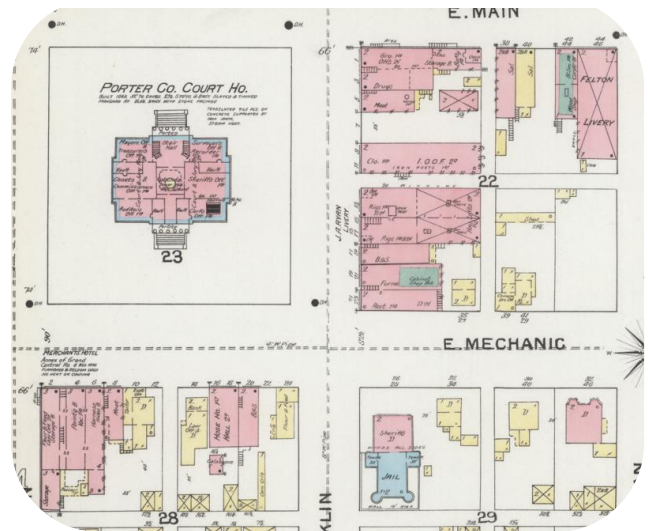


Figure 1: A comparison of the 1899 and 1905 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for Valparaiso show that the Thrift Trust Company Building, pictured in this 1907 postcard, replaced an earlier wood-framed bank and law office between those years.

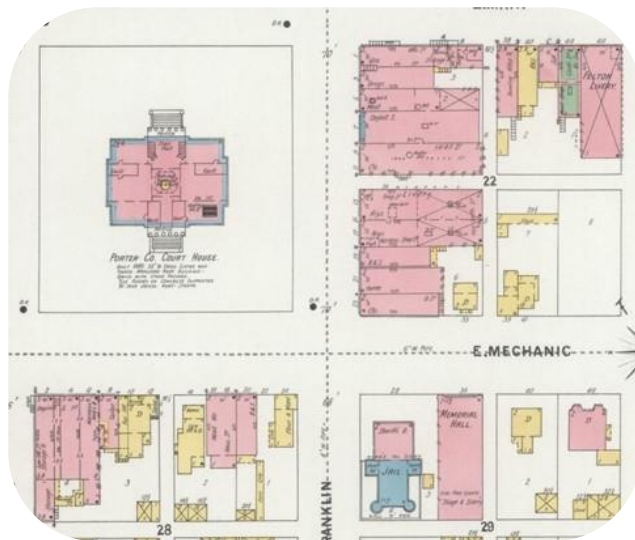
*Left: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Valparaiso, Porter County, Indiana, May 1899 and Dec. 1905, Credit: Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division, Sanborn Maps Collection; Right: Valparaiso Opera House, 1907, Credit: Indiana DNR Division of Historic Preservation & Archaeology*



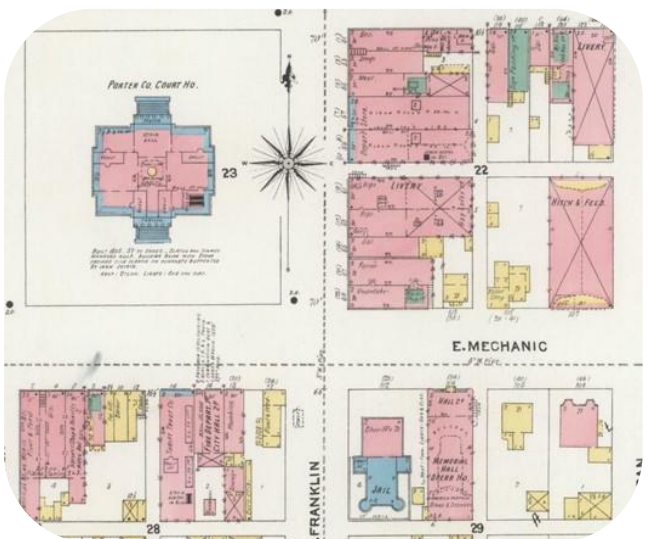
Valparaiso, May 1886



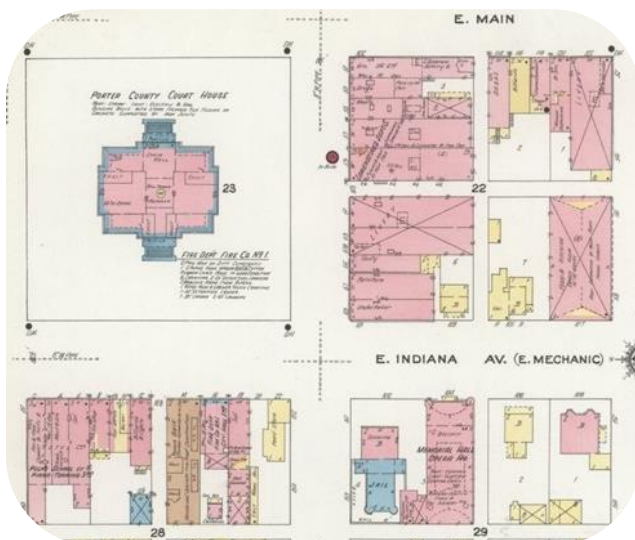
Valparaiso, December 1892



Valparaiso, May 1899



Valparaiso, December 1905



Valparaiso, November 1910

Figure 2: The Evolution of Downtown Valparaiso, 1886-1910

Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Valparaiso, Porter County, Indiana, May 1886, Dec. 1892, May 1899, Dec. 1905, and Nov. 1910, Credit: Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division, Sanborn Maps Collection



Architects and engineers utilize Sanborn maps to determine important components of a building's structure including original construction materials, building additions and alterations over time to aid in stabilization, rehabilitation, and demolition projects. [Figure 3]

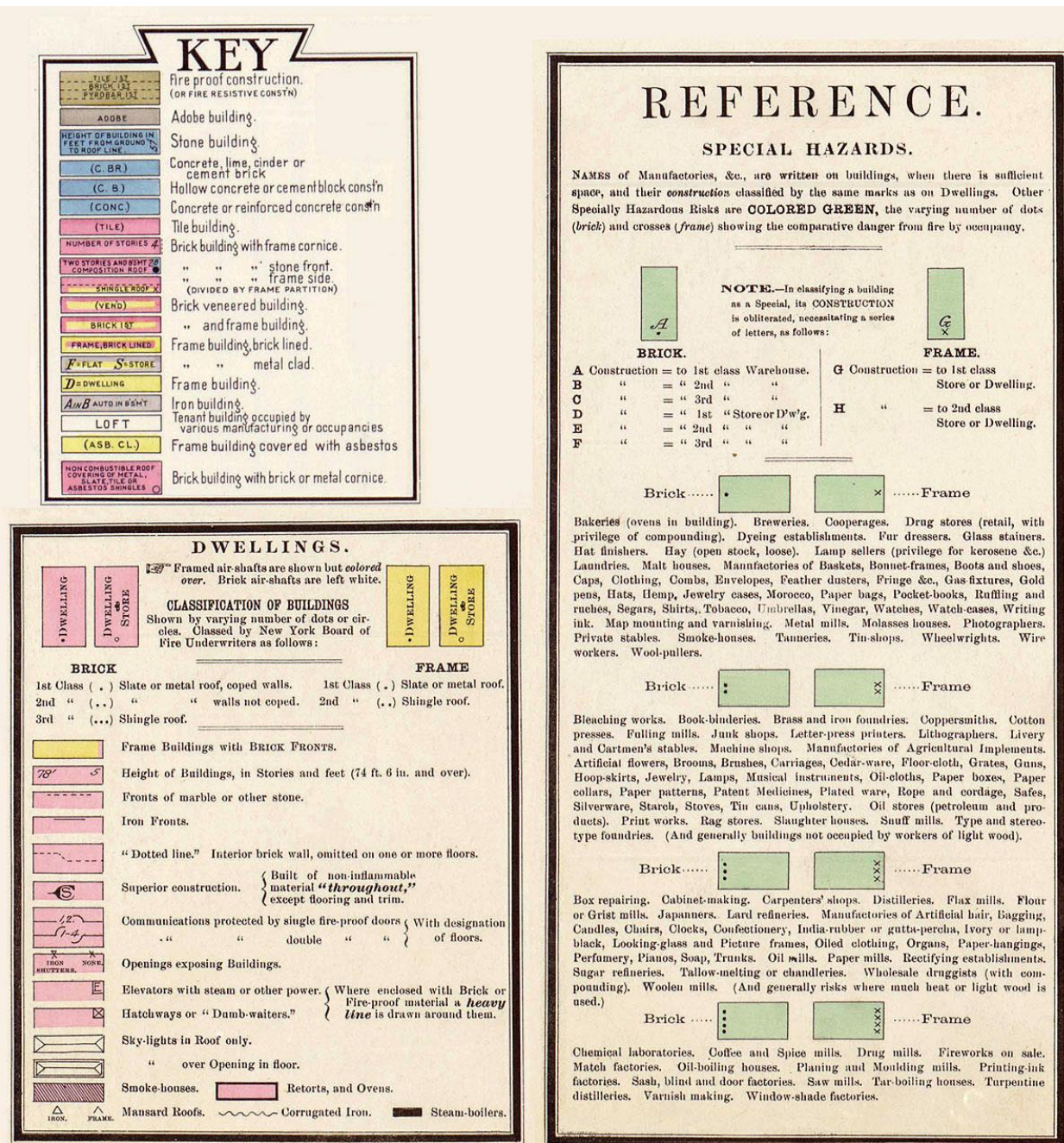


Figure 3: Sample Key for a Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Credit: Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division

Sanborn maps aid archaeologists during investigations in urban areas by providing historical context of the built environment. Property owners may utilize the maps to determine the historical use of their property, previous occupants, or any alterations or additions to their building. [Figure 4] Preservationists and historians use Sanborn maps to research the significance of properties for evaluation for listing in the National Register of Historic Places including associations with significant persons and events, architectural characteristics, and whether the property could be individually listed or listed as part of a commercial or residential historic district. Genealogists utilize

Sanborn maps to discover their ancestors' neighborhood where they lived, worked, and socialized. The maps help anyone visualize the sights, sounds, and smells of a neighborhood or commercial downtown.

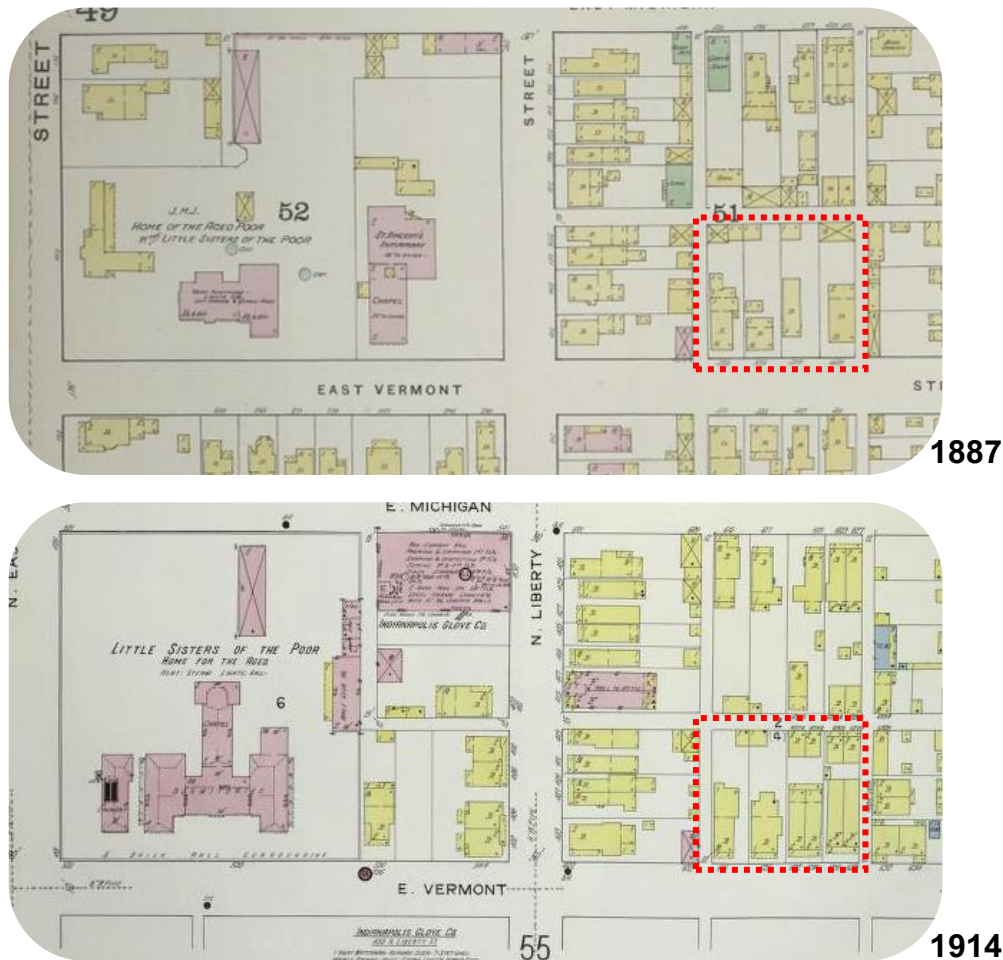


Figure 4: A comparison of the Indianapolis Lockerbie Square neighborhood, 1887 and 1914; *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Indianapolis, Marion County, Indiana, 1887 and 1915*, Credit: Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division

Sanborn maps published before 1923 (non-copyrighted) are available online at various institutions. The Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division ([loc.gov/collections/sanborn-maps](https://loc.gov/collections/sanborn-maps)) boasts one of the largest collections of Sanborn Maps in the world. The LOC is working on digitizing the years 1923-1926 as they are now part of the public domain. Also, check out the Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division's: "Fire Insurance Maps at the Library of Congress: A Resource Guide" available at [guides.loc.gov/fire-insurance-maps?loclr=blogmap](https://guides.loc.gov/fire-insurance-maps?loclr=blogmap). Additional Sanborn resources are available at: [guides.loc.gov/fire-insurance-maps/sanborn-resources](https://guides.loc.gov/fire-insurance-maps/sanborn-resources).

The pre-1923 Sanborn map collection for the State of Indiana is available through the Indiana Spatial Data Portal ([libraries.indiana.edu/union-list-sanborn-maps](https://libraries.indiana.edu/union-list-sanborn-maps)) and will soon be available for viewing by the general public. Maps published after 1923 are available on microfilm at the Indiana Room at the Indiana State Library ([IN.gov/library/collections-and-services/indiana/map-collection/sanborn/](https://in.gov/library/collections-and-services/indiana/map-collection/sanborn/)) as well as many local historical societies or public and university libraries.